

Title: Diversity in the Workplace

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I have chosen workplace diversity to focus on for my research paper because diversity is a growing trend in today's organization. Though it brings several advantages to the organization, but it also brings conflicts and problems to the organization that does not know how to handle it appropriately. It is critical to master the skills to manage diversified workforce effectively because people of different races, genders, religions and national origins have different perspectives, cultures, values or ways of getting things done. When an organization manages to handle diversified workforce effectively, it can increase job satisfaction as the employees would feel respected and appreciated which then motivates them to perform at their best in order to increase productivity and profitability. My research paper will cover subtopics such as organizational factors or challenges that influence diversity, strategies to increase workplace diversity, ways to facilitate positive effect of diversity on job performance and roles of employment counselor in encouraging or embracing workplace diversity.

“During the past decade, workplace diversity has become one of the most frequently discussed topics in management circles, while academic interest in the actual analysis of workplace diversity has remained limited” (Prasad & Mills, 2007). Organizational factors that influence workplace diversity are organizational policies, management practices and perceived inequity. “Diversity issues including short and long term agency concerns are rarely discussed in any consistent fashion” (Allison, 2009). “Numerous organizations have recognized and attempted to respond effectively to the demographic shifts in the workforce by launching diversity initiatives, hiring diversity consultants and offering an array of diversity training programs” (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). However, most of these efforts failed to demonstrate firm commitments to diversity as there is an on-going inconsistency existed between what organizations said about diversity in its policy and training and what they actually did about it. For management practices, it was found that lack of information to staff from management influences diversity in the workforce. According to Argyris (2003), it is not unusual for managers to hire people who are like them in style and substance which has been viewed as a perceived inequity that inhibits diversity to workplace.

Collins’s (2012) study found the following:

In the past several years, different regions of the world have experienced unique successes and challenges in achieving workplace diversity. While the United States has embraced diversity initiatives as a whole, the European Union has pioneered efforts to achieve gender parity in corporate management, and countries in Asia have set progressive quotas to increase the representation of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

“There have been noted improvements in the number of women represented on corporate boards in several countries, especially those with legally mandated gender quotas for board composition” (Collins, 2012). In 2011, Malaysia's Ministry of Women, Family, and

Community Development succeeded in passing an amendment to the 2004 regulation requiring 30 percent female directors on boards in the public sector and the law requires all publicly listed companies to also achieve the 30 percent mark by 2016 (Collins, 2012).

Collins's (2012) study found the following:

In Philippines, the Senate approved a bill in 2012 that would penalize employers for giving preferential treatment to male applicants and executives and another bill that would protect women from discriminatory compensation policies in all areas, including wages, salary, and employment benefits.

“Sexual harassment appeared as prohibited conduct in Turkish legislation for the first time in 2003, both for fulltime and part-time employees” (Collins, 2012). “In 2005, China's national legislature amended the Women's Protection Law to explicitly prohibit workplace harassment” (Collins, 2012).

There is evidence showing that diversity increases job performance as it improves innovation and creativity through the sharing of employees' greater pool of perspectives. There are few ways that can facilitate positive effect of diversity on job performance. The most recent empirical studies have examined that team learning behaviors and identity confirmation seem to mediate the relationship between diversity and group performance on the job (Roberge & Dick, 2010). Research reports positive outcomes associated with self-disclosure at work when deep-level diversity becomes more surface-level through self-disclosure (Roberge & Dick, 2010).

Many employers overlook the importance of orienting new employees which causes employees to feel unwelcomed to work in the company and are more likely to quit which has become a costly problem for many organizations (Neault & Mondair, 2011). Research has

also demonstrated that one-off initiatives in conducting diversity training workshops may not be effective in eliminating deeply-rooted stereotypes or beliefs about others (Neault & Mondair, 2011).

Diversity is increasing in today's organizations. Knowing to value and appreciate diversity of thoughts and perspectives shared by individuals are seen to benefit the organizations. What is considered of good quality today may not be the case for tomorrow. Therefore, any organizations need to keep up with the global market trend by 24/7 working on and improving on its products and services in the aspects of innovation and creativity to meet new customer needs in order to stay competitive. This requires efforts and hard work from employees because they are the valuable assets to determine a company's success and help organization to gain competitive advantage by contributing their creativity and innovative ideas at work that can never be duplicated. Diversity deals with both visible and invisible characteristics. Visible characteristics of diversity include age, gender and race whereas its invisible characteristics include religious beliefs, educational background, work experience and marital status. "In the context of the workplace, valuing diversity means creating a workplace that respects and includes these differences, recognizing the unique contributions that individuals with many types of differences can make and creating a work environment that maximizes the potential of all employees" (Ayub, Aslam, Razzaq, Iftikhar, & Hafeez, 2013). Action speaks louder than words. Simply having diversity included in policy setting is not enough because carrying it out is the crucial part which would then determines whether the organization really takes diversity into serious account and have it effectively implemented. Having it effectively implemented would create a harmonized diverse workplace in order to increase productivity and profitability. An organization's commitment to diversity is reflected in the extent to which diversity policies and procedures are mutually understood and communicated (Cox, 2004). Diversity policies should be aligned with organizational mission and vision at all times so that all employees can see how their jobs actually link or contribute to the overall mission and vision. Organizations should be aware when they plan and implement organizational systems and practices to manage people.

They should keep in mind that their management practices should focus on maximizing potential advantage of diversity while minimizing potential disadvantages of it. Management practices such as incomplete or inaccurate information communicated from management to employees can create conflicts, discomforts and confusion which leads up to poor performance and low productivity especially in a diverse workplace as the employees are not given the necessary input for them to be able to perform well at work. In addition to that, communications are especially crucial in management practices of a diverse workplace because different people have different perspectives, values, cultures and ways of getting things done. Thus, it would easily cause misunderstandings if there is a lack of communications or ineffective communications in the company either from managers to employees or employees to managers. Perceived inequity in hiring, promotion and training inhibits diversity to workplace. Managers tend to favor in hiring people who are like them in style and substance. This organizational cloning has its good and bad sides just like the saying of every cloud has a silver lining. The good side is that it makes not only increased comfort levels with coworkers but also allows one to foster continuity in the company consistent with the current management culture (Ayub, Aslam, Razzaq, Iftkhar, & Hafeez, 2013). However, such behavior is adversarial to diversity goals and it often becomes the basis for the loss of a great talent pool from the organization.

Collins's (2012) study found the following:

Over the last thirty years, many countries have passed some form of regulation to promote diversity in the workplace. From recruitment and retention to promotion and wage setting, multinational organizations, no matter where they are headquartered, must meet the legal challenges posed by both domestic and international antidiscrimination legislation.

To increase corporate diversity, companies need to focus on the necessity of equal opportunity and the desire to eradicate prejudices and stereotypes that historically have limited the representation of disadvantaged groups by emphasizing equal employment opportunities and affirmative action initiatives that are associated with diversity management (Collins, 2012). In the United States, legislative and court-ordered mandates are prime examples of external forces that compel a corporation to diversity such as the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Collins, 2012). “Positive discrimination refers to a system of practices, such as hiring quotas, designed to directly increase the proportion of people from minorities in the workplace which is widely practiced throughout Europe, North America, Africa, and India” (Collins, 2012). In the United States, positive discrimination, which is more commonly known as affirmative action, is most closely associated with the aim of reversing the historical disadvantages placed upon minority groups (Collins, 2012). Legally mandated gender quotas are one apparently effective form of positive discrimination that has taken hold in Europe and are also starting to appear outside of Europe as well which serve to promote or increase women’s economic interests (Collins, 2012).

Collins’s (2012) study found the following:

Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg made headlines as the first female appointed to the board of Facebook, a publicly traded billion-dollar social media enterprise and with the addition of Sandberg, Facebook is making strides toward its goal of achieving a more inclusive board that represents the interests of the company's large and diverse user base.

Besides that, United States obligates an employer to provide reasonable accommodations to a disabled employee through the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Collins' (2012) study found the following:

In China, the Regulation of Employment for People with Disabilities establishes a framework for promoting the rights of disabled workers. The regulation requires all public and private employers to reserve 1.5 percent of job opportunities for people with disabilities. Employers who fail to comply with this quota must pay a monetary fine to the Disabled Persons' Employment Fund, which supports vocational training and placement services for disabled persons.

Moreover, under the Fair Pay Act, employers must maintain and report job categories and pay scales for review by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Collins, 2012). This enables victims of pay discrimination to challenge unequal pay more effectively. When employees feel that their pay rates are fair, they will feel satisfied and worthy to contribute their ideas and hard work to keep the company moving forward toward achieving its mission and vision. Furthermore, harassment is defined as the unwanted conduct related to racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation that takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (Collins, 2012). In today's organizations, harassment does not only aim at women but men as well. All kinds of harassment should be eliminated so that all employees will feel respected and highly valued which will increase their feelings of safety and secureness in the workplace. This will in turn reduce turnover rates and retains talented pool of employees. Last but not least, anti-discrimination initiatives also have advanced equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) employees in the global workplace (Collins, 2012). For instance, the Equality Act in the United Kingdom makes it direct discrimination to treat LGBT employees unfavorably on the grounds of their sexual orientation (Collins, 2012). As developments

continue to unfold in the legal landscape, corporations will have to monitor and adjust their diversity strategies or programs to remain compliant and on track in order to stay competitive.

Diverse workforce is more likely to possess a greater pool of task-relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and perspectives that are distinct and non-redundant which in turn leads to increased creativity and innovation at work. A common and practical application that supports diversity is when organizations utilize cross-functional teams to ensure greater pool of perspectives in opinions and experiences are generated in order to make the best decision for the profit or best interest of the company. Team learning behaviors and identity confirmation can facilitate positive effect of diversity on group performance on the job. The model “team learning behavior” basically expands our comprehension of the necessary knowledge that a heterogeneous group needs to acquire in order to function effectively-knowledge of information about the task as well as their common identity (Roberge & Dick, 2010). “At an individual level, the model identifies empathy and self-disclosure as the main mechanisms whereas at a group level, communication, group involvement and group focus are the main focus” (Roberge & Dick, 2010). Empathy is defined as an individual psychological process through which people identify and understand another's situation, feelings, and motives (Roberge & Dick, 2010). It is the process by which people learn about each other, incorporate others' identities into their own self and as a result, arrive at a better understanding, tolerating and cooperating with one another. For instance, perspective taking with empathy can be a useful strategy to decrease the tendency to apply stereotypes and to get an accurate understanding of the perspective that is distinct from the self because it allows one to be able to learn, understand and accept open-mindedly on how that perspective comes about from the other party instead of insisting to agree upon self's perspective. This definitely helps in improving job performance because it's always encouraging to look at things from different perspectives so that we are able to make rational and more accurate decisions which

we will not regret in the end. Besides empathy, self-disclosure can have significant benefits when people are willing to reveal information about who they are. “For instance, in the domain of mental and physical disabilities, self-disclosing possible limitations due to a disability may help the employer to provide adequate accommodations that may be beneficial for the functioning of the individuals” (Ball, Monaco, Schmeling, Schartz, & Blanck, 2005). If the disabled employee does not acquire self-disclosure, the employer would not know about the possible limitations he or she has due to the disability and would not then be able to provide proper accommodation which will affect the ability of the disabled employee to reach certain expectation set by the employer. This will then lead to conflicts as well as misunderstandings between both parties. In addition, self-disclosure can also help to foster the development of trusting interpersonal relationships. This is especially important when distrust may already exist in a heterogeneous group due to the primary reason, which is the difference in identities. When team members share information thoroughly and accurately either on tasks or personal identities with one another especially in a diverse workgroup, trust will be developed. For example, when members share personal identities, some may find similarities in others which will help to develop trust more easily. When there is trust among team members, it increases cooperation and cohesiveness which help to run projects more smoothly and progressively. Effective communication is vital especially in a diverse workforce. Management should take into account that different people of different cultures adopt to different communication styles. Being able to master effective communication skills based on cues is critical and it helps in determining the success of the company. Company that does not have effective communication is not able to get their messages truly understood and acted upon by employees which in turn lead to poor performance because employees are not able to receive necessary or accurate input for them to perform at their best. Having an open communication is also essential to increase job performance because all employees

despite their background are given opportunity to express their opinions which makes them feel empowered and increases their level of satisfaction at work. When employees feel satisfied, they will feel more worthy to contribute or outperform at their jobs toward achieving the organization mission and vision. Furthermore, diversity increases job performance when there is collective identity and psychological safety climate (Roberge & Dick, 2010). As we all know, a diverse workforce will definitely encounter biases but there is always a way to get rid of them. For the aspect of collective identity, intergroup biases can be reduced by transforming team members from a “we” and “they” attitudes toward an “us”. When biases are avoided, conflicts, misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices can be avoided as well. “Psychological safety climate has been defined as shared beliefs among members, stemming from mutual respect and trust” (Roberge & Dick, 2010). An organization is considered safe when the environment provides a sense of confidence and comfort in which no member feels he or she will be rejected or punished for expressing different ideas and opinions. This will help in producing better solutions to problems and a higher level of critical analysis.

Employment counselors have traditionally assisted individuals who are unemployed and also work with those who are unhappy and dissatisfied at their jobs. In today’s economy that is affected by high unemployment rates and skill shortages, one potential new role for employment counselors to do is to support employers in creating workplaces where diverse workers are welcomed, appreciated and encouraged to contribute (Neault & Mondair, 2011). This can lead to an increase in satisfaction level of employees who are currently working in the company so that turnover and unemployment rates can be reduced. One important thing to notify is that those who left the organization as a result of job dissatisfaction are usually the highly skilled workers. Thus, the company will result in skill shortages. In addition, when diverse workers are welcomed to work in a company, the problem of skill shortages can be

solved because a heterogeneous group of workers will contribute more varieties of skills and abilities on a given task compared to a homogeneous group. The first role of employment counselors is to prepare candidates for interviews or work placements in which they are increasingly expected to support candidates with a variety of employment barriers such as limited work experience, communication challenges or self-confidence issues which may need extensive coaching (Neault & Mondair, 2011). There are cases where candidates who fully met the requirements of the job are not employed just because they lack confidence in presenting themselves during the face-to-face interview. Some candidates find themselves unconfident to speak out due to the reason that English is not their first language. This can lead to high unemployment rates and skill shortages because the candidates may have the skills needed but they just lack the ability to present themselves confidently, despite English not being their first language. Besides that, employment counselors may support human resource professionals or hiring managers through prescreened referrals of suitable candidates, recommendations of culture-fair assessment tools or increasing their awareness of workers who are currently underrepresented in the workplace- older workers, persons with disabilities and youth (Neault & Mondair, 2011). This can help to ensure a fair selection process is carried out despite candidates' backgrounds. Employment counselors should also facilitate orientation for new employees. This can give a sense of a warm and welcoming atmosphere to the new employees and allow them to grasp a bigger knowledge or idea of how the organizational culture and system operate. By doing so, it makes them feel comfortable and supported in getting started in their new job which will decrease the possibility of employee turnover and motivate them to perform better. To effectively eliminate deeply-rooted stereotypes and beliefs about others' cultures, employment counselors may need to play an ongoing role in supporting diversity awareness, conducting diversity-training workshops and individually coaching employees or managers who are struggling to embrace diversity at the

workplace (Neault & Mondair, 2011). To do this well, however, employment counselors need to examine their own stereotypes, beliefs and biases as they take a culture-infused approach to their work so that they can avoid being biased (Neault & Mondair, 2011). This is especially crucial when they are individually coaching employees and managers who are struggling to embrace diversity. Once they allow their biases to interfere during the coaching process, things may turn out to become worse. Furthermore, employment counselors can also provide additional support toward diversity by facilitating team building or team strengthening activities and focusing on project or departmental teams as a whole rather than on specific subgroups or cultures (Neault & Mondair, 2011). For instance, they can advise managers to assign more projects that require employees from cross-departments to work on together. As coworkers learn to respect and appreciate each other as unique people and potential contributors, productivity is likely to increase, conflict is likely to decrease and strong interdependent relationships will be established throughout the organization (Neault & Mondair, 2011). Employment counselors may be called upon to contribute their counseling or coaching skills when unproductive conflict occurs in the organization (Neault & Mondair, 2011). For instance, if a conflict is rooted in deep-seated prejudice, it may be necessary to address the underlying beliefs, fears or stereotypes before the conflict can be resolved which requires the help from employment counselors who are more familiar in dealing with diversity issues. Inevitably, employees do leave organizations, sometimes under challenging circumstances. In this case, employment counselors could be contracted by organizations to conduct exit interviews with employees who were fired or quit which in turn used to facilitate organizational change to embrace diversity more effectively (Neault & Mondair, 2011).

Conclusion: In short, workplaces that embrace diversity create environments in which employees do not need to hide or disguise aspects of who they are in order to be respected and appreciated by their colleagues and managers. There are few steps that I would recommend for an organization to take to implement diversity. First of all, managers should assign more group tasks or projects that involve members from cross-functional departments. Managers should incorporate diversity aspect into performance measures. Besides that, managers should develop a fair and effective complaint resolution process. To do this, managers need to ensure complaint investigation is being conducted thoroughly and comprehensively. Managers should assign a trained professional to respond to complaints in order to avoid any biases involved throughout the process. In addition, managers should ensure fair hiring, training, pay and promotion practices to all employees. There should be no discrimination to any of the staff in the organization. Last but not least, managers should practice employee empowerment. By implementing employee empowerment effectively, managers should listen attentively to ideas voiced out by every employee disregard of their backgrounds. They should incorporate ideas from women and minorities in every meeting. Having those steps implementing especially in a diverse workplace, employees will be able to work happily, confidently, comfortably and open-mindedly to be productive and creative. This will in turn help the organization to achieve profitability and stay competitive. With effective management of diversity, the managers are able to develop and maintain a greater pool of talent as well as to save money and time in recruitment and turnover costs.

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